

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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USIA-06 IO-10 /070 W

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R 231208Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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AMCONSUL UDORN

CINCPAC HONOLULU

USSAG NAKHON PHANOM

DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 1325

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJ: WHY ACCURATE THAI ELECTION PREDICTIONS ARE DIFFICULT

REF: A) BANGKOK 1134; B) BANGKOK 1135

SUMMARY:

THAI POLITICAL PROPHETS AND PARTY ORGANIZERS HAVE ADOPTED THE CONVENTIONAL EISDOM THAT SINCE PERSONALITIES DOMINATE THAI ELECTORAL POLITICS, THE CANDIDATES WHO SUCCESSFULLY RAN FOR ELECTION IN FEBRUARY 1969 WOULD BE THE MEN WITH THE UPPER HAND IN THE PRESENT CONTESTS. SUCH AN ASSUMPTION IS THE BASIS FOR THE PREDICTIONS IN THE REFTELS. MANY FACTORS LIMIT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF POLITICAL PREDICTIONS BASED ON SUCH A THEORY. IT HAS BEEN SIX YEARS SINCE THE LAST POLLING OF THE THAI POPULATION. THE COMPETITION IS KEENER THAN BEFORE IN SOME RACES. THERE ARE 50 MORE SEATS. THE LARGE NUMBER OF PARTIES AND CANDIDATES, AND THE DIVISION OF SOME PROVINCES INTO ELECTORAL DISTRICTS, TEND TO WATER DOWN THE

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VOTE. THE GOVERNMENT FOR THE FIRST TIME IS NEUTRAL, AND

IS ENGAGED IN AN EXTENSIVE VOTER EDUCATION PROGRAM WHICH WILL PROBABLY INCREASE VOTER TURNOUT AND SOPHISTICATION. FURTHERMORE WE MAY UNINTENTIONALLY HAVE PICKED UP BIASES FROM OUR SOURCES. ALL THESE FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO MAKING ACCURATE PREDICTIONS OF THE RESULTS OF THE THAI PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS DIFFICULT. END SUMMARY

I. INSTANT POLITICS

1. THE SUDDEN COLLAPSE OF THE THANOM KITTAKACHON GOVERNMENT IN OCTOBER 1973 USHERED IN A NEW CONSTITUTION AND SET THE STAGE FOR NATIONAL ELECTIONS. THE RETURN TO PARLIAMENTARY POLITICS PRESENTS A NUMBER OF TRANSITION PROBLEMS. THE THAI ELECTORATE HAD ONLY GONE TO THE POLLS ONCE IN THE LAST EIGHTEEN YEARS. DURING THE SAME TIME SPAN POLITICAL PARTIES WERE LEGAL FOR ONLY TWO YEARS.

2. THESE LONG TIME GAPS CREATE A WEAKNESS IN THE THAI PARLIAMENTARY PROCESS. THE PAUCITY OF ELECTIONS HAS WEAKENED THE PARAPHERNALIA OF POLITICS. POLITICAL PARTIES, SLOGANS, AND CAMPAIGN ISSUES MEAN LITTLE IN THE PRESENT ELECTION WHICH IS STILL PERSONAL, ELITIST, AND SIAMESE IN ITS POWER JOCKEYING.

3. THE 1974 CONSTITUTION REQUIRES THAT PARLIAMENTARIANS BE MEMBERS OF POLITICAL PARTIES. POLITICAL ORGANIZERS THUS HAVE FALLEN BACK ON THOSE INDIVIDUALS WHO WERE ELECTED IN 1969 AND SERVED IN THE 1969-71 PARLIAMENT. THE FORMER PARLIAMENTARIANS BECAME THE CORE OF MOST OF THE IMPORTANT POLITICAL PARTIES. THE CONSERVATIVE ESTABLISHMENT PARTIES PARTICULARLY RELIED ON PARLIAMENTARIANS FROM THE FORMER REGIME'S UTPP. THE DEMOCRAT PARTY IS TRYING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS SAME OPERATING ASSUMPTION BY RUNNING TEAMS OF ONE EXPERIENCED CANDIDATE AND ONE NEWCOMER IN THE SAME DISTRICT. CONVENTIONAL WISDOM THUS HELD THAT THE COMBINATION OF MONEY AND CORE OF FORMER PARLIAMENTARIANS WOULD SUFFICE FOR THE JANUARY 1975 ELECTIONS.

II. THE ELECTION STRUCTURE

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4. NEWCOMERS HAVE A RESPECTABLE CHANCE OF ELECTION. THE NEW PARLIAMENT WHICH WILL SIT AFTER THE JANUARY ELECTIONS WILL HAVE 50 MORE SEATS THAN ITS 1969 PREDECESSOR, CREATING 50 ELECTORAL CONTESTS FOR WHICH THERE ARE NO PREVIOUS WINNERS. A PRELIMINARY STUDY ROUGHLY ESTIMATES THAT PERHAPS ONLY 150 OF THE PARLIAMENTARIANS WHO SAT IN THE 1969-71 ASSEMBLY ARE RUNNING IN THE PRESENT ELECTION. THE NEW SEATS PLUS THE ABSENTEES MEAN THAT NEWCOMERS ARE COMPETING FOR APPROXIMATELY

120 SEATS, OR OVER 40 PERCENT OF THOSE IN THE NEW PARLIAMENT.

5. THE COMPETITION IS KEENER IN THE PRESENT ELECTION. THE CALIBER OF THE SOCIAL ACTION PARTY (SAP) CANDIDATES IN BANGKOK IS SUCH THAT THE FORMER DEMOCRAT MONOPOLY IN THE METROPOLITAN CAPITAL WILL TURN INTO A BARE MAJORITY. IN THE NORTH, SAP AND THE DEMOCRATS MAY GET THE NOD IF THE VOTERS REJECT THE FORMER PARLIAMENTARIANS OF THE CONSERVATIVE ESTABLISHMENT PARTIES. IN NORTHEAST THAILAND, NEWCOMERS IN THE ESTABLISHMENT PARTIES WILL WIN THEIR CONTESTS IF THE FORMER PARLIAMENTARIANS' POPULARITY SLIPS.

6. THE ADOPTION OF ELECTORAL DISTRICTS ALSO SHARPENS THE COMPETITION. THERE ARE NUMEROUS ELECTION DISTRICTS IN WHICH THE NUMBER OF FORMER PARLIAMENTARIANS OR LEADING CANDIDATES EXCEEDS THE NUMBER OF PARLIAMENTARY SEATS. CHON-BURI PROVINCE ELECTION DISTRICT ONE, WITH TWO SEATS, HAS FOUR LEADING CANDIDATES INCLUDING SAP SECRETARY GENERAL BUNCHU ROTCHANASATHIAN, AND THAI NATION PARTY DEPUTY LEADER SIRI SIRIYOTHIN.

7. ALTHOUGH THERE ARE 42 POLITICAL PARTIES RUNNING 2198 CANDIDATES IN THE ELECTIONS, MOST OF THESE PARTIES ARE NEITHER VIABLE POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS NOR SERIOUS CHALLENGES TO THE SIX MAJOR ORGANIZATIONAL CONTENDERS. THE LARGE NUMBER OF CANDIDATES IN ANY PARTICULAR RACE WATER DOWN OR SPLIT THE VOTE CAUSING CLOSE CONTESTS. WINNING CANDIDATES MAY THUS POLL ONLY 20 - 30 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL VOTE. IN 1969 THERE WERE A NUMBER OF CASES IN WHICH THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WINNING AND LOSING WAS 50 VOTES.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGKOK 1325

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8. THE VOTER TURNOUT OF SUNDAY, JANUARY 26 IS EXPECTED TO BE HIGHER THAN THE 49.33 PERCENT REGISTERED IN 1969. THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR'S (MOI) EXTENSIVE VOTER EDUCATION PROGRAM WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY INCREASE. DURING OUR PRE-ELECTION TRAVELS, PROVINCIAL AND DISTRICT LEVEL OFFICIALS HAVE OFTEN NOT BEEN IN THEIR OFFICES BECAUSE THEY WERE HOLDING MEETINGS WITH VILLAGERS. MOI HAS ADOPTED AND BEEN TRYING TO ENFORCE A STRICT NEUTRALITY. IN UPHOLDING MOI NEUTRALITY SOME AGGRESSIVE DISTRICT OFFICERS HAVE INTERFERED WITH THE PREVIOUSLY WELL-USED LINK BETWEEN THE CANDIDATES AND THE ELECTORATE THROUGH VILLAGE LEADERS SUCH AS TEACHERS OR VILLAGE CHIEFS.

III. THE SAMPLE

9. MOST OF THE PEOPLE WITH WHOM WE SPOKE IN ORDER TO PREPARE OUR PREDICTIONS WERE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, AMNY OF WHOM PROBABLY TEND TO HAVE A CONSERVATIVE OUTLOOK ON THE CAMPAIGN. OFFICIAL THAI GOVERNMENT ESTIMATES WE HAVE SEEN TEND TO RANK THE CONSERV-
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ATIVE PARTY CANDIDATES HIGH, AND DOWN GRADE OR NOT LIST THE CENTRIST AND PARTICULARLY LEFTIST CANDIDATES. A SIMILAR BIAS MAY THUS HAVE INFILTRATED OUR PREDICTIONS.

10. CONSIDERABLE SOCIAL CHANGE HAS OCCURRED IN THAILAND WITHIN THE LAST SIX YEARS BUT FEW POLITICAL PROPHETS GIVE ALLOWANCE FOR AN ELECTORAL EXPRESSION OF THESE CHANGES.

IV. CONCLUSION

11. MORE ROOM FOR NEW CANDIDATES, KEENER COMPETITION, MORE CANDIDATES, CLOSER ELECTION RESULTS, HIGHER VOTER TURNOUT, AND MOI NEUTRALITY ALL MAKE DEFINITE PREDICTIONS ABOUT THE RESULTS OF THE APPROACHING THAI PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS DIFFICULT. THE READER SHOULD TAKE THE EMBASSY'S OWN PREDICTIONS IN REFTELS WITH SEVERAL GRAINS OF AJINOMOTO. THERE IS EASILY A TEN PERCENT ERROR IN THE TOTAL FOR ANY ONE POLITICAL PARTY.

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